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# Sunday Play

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## SUNDAY PLAY.\*

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I believe our Sunday laws forbidding play and sport are in the main an evil. I believe that they do much harm and prevent a great deal of good. I believe that games and play on Sunday, under proper restrictions as to time, place and noise, should be not only permitted but encouraged. I believe that the provision in our game laws forbidding fishing and shooting on Sunday is wrong. It is a rich man's law. It would be better to forbid these forms of sport on any day except Sunday, so as to reserve the game for the one day in the week when the average citizen can go after it.

That Sunday is to a great extent, for city children at least, a day of lawlessness and demoralization cannot, I think, be successfully disputed. There are, so far as I am aware, no statistics upon the point, but I have gathered a considerable amount of testimony from social workers to the effect that Sunday is at present the especial day for the planning and carrying out of mischief and law-breaking in various forms, and that in particular it is, among city boys, very largely devoted to gambling. Whatever the explanation may be, Sunday is as a matter of fact, for great numbers, if not for the majority of our children, a radiating center of evil tendencies for the entire week.

And that Sunday should have a demoralizing effect would seem to be the inevitable result of our present Sunday laws. If its influence were not in great measure an evil one it would not be for the omission on our part of the sort of measure best calculated to make it so. We rightly prohibit work on Sunday so far as practicable. Our laws to that effect are essential to the existence of Sunday and constitute a most beneficent piece of legislation. But by forbidding play also, we have done our best to make the day, for our young people at least, a day of idleness; and the distinction between enjoining idleness and promoting evil is one hardly worth insisting on.

It is true that we do permit some forms of play.

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Reading, gossip, paying visits, are lawful, as are also riding, yachting, automobiling and aviation. Walking also is permitted; but so far as games suited to young people and not requiring an independent fortune are concerned, we make our prohibition fairly general.

It is true, also, that we foster and support the church; and going to church represents for many, even of our young people, a most valuable part of what Sunday means and ought to mean. But we cannot spend all the waking hours in church, even if the hours we spend there are all waking hours. When church is over, there is still a long day left to be filled up, and sedentary pursuits would never wholly fill it for the young. It would seem as though we had entered into a certain sort of partnership, more common during the middle ages than it is to-day,—our contribution being to find the idle hands while the party of the other part, a reputed expert in that line, agrees to do the rest.

You know what happens when you make a dam across a brook. It backs up onto people's lawns and orchards, floods their cellars, carries off their apples and other movable possessions, tears their shrubs and flowers, and drowns their hens. In short, it trespasses generally on their property and their good nature, to the detriment of both. Whose fault is it in that case that these depredations occur? Who is in reality the creator of such area of devastation? In the analogous case now under consideration we have hitherto blamed the brook. I think it is time that we traced the evil a little nearer home.

Our present Sunday laws are like that unwise sort of factory legislation which forbids children to work without requiring them to go to school; except that our Sunday legislation goes a step further in forbidding play as well. It thus holds the first place as an example of legislation enjoining idleness and producing crime.

What has got us into this position is the fact that our Sunday laws are a survival, a shell left on the seashore, from which the living creature has departed, the negative side of an institution that no longer lives. The Puritan Sunday law was a positive, not a negative, enactment. The Sunday it prescribed was not a day of idleness but of observance. Going to church was mandatory, and



church was carried on for several hours twice during the day. It must have been a torture to the young people, but at least it occupied them instead of merely cutting off all natural occupation and, except for an hour in the morning, leaving nothing in its place. We retain the restrictions after the conception of the Sabbath for which they stood has been abandoned. The fortress has become a prison. What was once armor against Satan and his wiles survives as an incumbrance that delivers us more helpless into his hands. It is as though we went down to business each morning rigged out in the breast plate and buff coat of some Puritan ancestor, carrying a flintlock along with us by way of walking stick merely because these accessories were once useful as protection against Indian attacks.

There is already evidence of a practical and increasing recognition of the true cause of Sunday lawlessness. In New York the park board has opened Central Park for tennis and baseball on Sunday afternoons. Similar Sunday opportunities are furnished in Chicago and elsewhere. In Boston we have learned to permit certain kinds of sport such as swimming, skating and tobogganing (not all at the same time of year); but anything in which a ball is used is still anathema. I believe that such exceptions to our Sunday law will grow until our whole public provision in the matter of Sunday play has been radically modified, and that the sooner such a change is brought about the better will it be for us. Exactly what modification should be made is a matter that must be worked out by experience and that will always be dealt with somewhat differently in different communities. In general, I believe that all kinds of games and sports that are permissible, at any time, including ball games, should be allowed on Sunday, under proper restrictions as to time, place and noise. I do not believe that such modification will take from Sunday any of the attributes that have endeared it to us and that make it one of the most important of our institutions. On the contrary it is in the interest of Sunday, of its fuller realization, that we shall remove the fetters we have placed upon it.

But the great evil of our Sunday laws is not in the harm they do but in the good that they prevent. Their great sin is against Sunday itself. Their revision is called for not merely because they



have pushed poor human nature to the wall and forced it into lawbreaking in self-defense, but more especially because they have deprived this most beneficent institution of half its proper service to mankind.

What we need first of all to understand in looking at this question is that a day of idleness is not a day of rest. Our Sunday laws in prescribing idleness do not safeguard the Sabbath; they forbid its true observance. Rest for the young, for the healthy of any age, for anybody who is still in any sense alive, does not consist exclusively in lying down. What rests a man is not the attempt to stop the machinery of life, but the turning of the vital force into refreshing channels. The inevitably futile attempt to do nothing has the same effect on the human mechanism that is produced on a steamboat in a head sea when the screw comes out of water. The machine keeps on whirling just the same, only it racks the ship instead of sending her ahead. A boy will be more tired at the end of a day spent in idling about than after ten hours of some vigorous pursuit in the open air. We cannot too deeply take to heart the fact that for the human spirit loafing is not repose, but a source of fatigue and even of disease. Enforcement of Sunday idleness is, for a great proportion of the community at least, including all of the healthy young, the prohibition of Sunday rest.

And Sunday is not for rest alone. Its true service is a positive, not a negative one. It is not like the night, simply for sleep—a blank space between one working period and another. It is, on the contrary, a time set apart for the most important action of the week. It should be our fullest day and not our emptiest.

The churches have been right in this; and they have themselves supplied what is to most people an essential part of the re-creative experience for which Sunday stands. No Sunday legislation will be wise or adequate which fails to give them its protection and support. Church services should, for instance, be protected against the making of unnecessary noise in their neighborhood.

But Sunday is older than the church, and its purposes are wider than those that the church fulfills. The month and its division into weeks, if Darwin's hypothesis is correct, is older than man himself. Stamped in the physiology of all the mammals, and dating back to the time when the lives of our amphibious ancestors



were governed by the period of the spring tides, the ancient sovereignty of the week seemingly justifies a generalization of Falstaff's sagacious boast that we are ruled as the tide is by our noble and chaste mistress the moon. At all events, whatever its physiological or historical foundation, the need of Sunday lies deep in human nature and would still be there even if there were no church, and has other expressions than church going, important as that is.

There is, however, another use of Sunday, analogous to church going and usually a part of it; namely, recollection, in the sense of the Italian word *racogliamento*, the re-collection or re-assembling of the soul. In every stream there should be now and then a pool in which the hurry and the noise ceases and we can see into the depths. Sunday is the day to allow the dust to settle and look around, to pull ourselves together, observe our bearings on our more universal relations, note the variations of the compass, and lay out our course anew. Such a periodic re-assembling is necessary to the integrity and permanence of life, to the cumulative value of character. And for this purpose as well as for church going, wanton and unnecessary noise on the Sunday should be suppressed. Match games, for instance, at which crowds are permitted to assemble, should be relegated, so far as feasible, to the remoter portions of the town.

But not even for the spiritual advantages of Sunday quiet must sounds incidental to other and positive uses of the day be too strictly suppressed. People must still be allowed to play the organ and to sing hymns, even though it disturbs your meditation, and the same is true of other useful and profitable observances.

Another use of Sunday is as family day. It is the day on which the father is at home, the day for playing the new piece on the piano, for singing hymns and songs, seeing the baby's new tooth and making the old man himself show what he can do in reading aloud, or any other stunts he thinks he knows. It is the day for going to the beach, country excursions and trolley rides, for visiting museums and parks. I believe it should be a condition on violation of which the charter of any well-mounted museum or library should be forfeited, that it should be open on Sunday afternoons.



In this connection the question of professional baseball and other public entertainments might logically be discussed. But these form a separate question and one apart from my present subject. In general my own belief is that professional entertainments, including baseball, involving as they do Sunday work, should be prohibited except where, as in the case of municipal concerts, they are incidental to the use of some park or other desirable place of public recreation and enhance its value.

But besides rest, religion and recreation—the three R's of sabbatarian observance—and its use as family day, Sunday fulfills another more essential service, a service which embodies, indeed, the aboriginal and inclusive purpose for the sake of which such an institution exists. Sunday is the day of compensation, the day of fulfillment to those essential purposes of life for which the weekday has left no room. It is the day for completing the pattern, for weaving into the texture of our lives those main strands of being which would otherwise be left out, and without which we are not quite alive.

A young man has spent the week bending over the columns of a ledger. A young woman has passed the working days standing at a machine making a few simple motions of the hand. The golden hours of strength and youth, the morning hours in which the vital current is at its height, which mould life and destiny in their image according to the use we make of them, have gone in such employments as these. Obviously some special provision must be made, some compensatory activity supplied, if life worthy of the name is to be preserved for these. The same is true of many lives of workers in our mills and factories. It is true to some extent of any life under the system of industrial specialization. For hardly any employment is so broad and catholic, so pervious to the motions of the human spirit and so inclusive of them, as wholly to convey the soul of any man.

It is true that the greatest good fortune of our modern world lies perhaps in the fact that we have outlived the notion that useful work can be degrading. But it is time we came to recognize the truth that lay behind that superstition. It should be at least a sobering thought that the great majority of us are living, and that our young people are growing and taking form, under conditions



that the vast majority of mankind have looked upon as involving a disgrace. Has a sentiment universally admitted until within a comparatively insignificant period of time been so devoid of truth as we now suppose? Is the Indian so wholly wrong when he refuses to surrender the free life of the plains to become the drudge of the factory and the dweller in a city tenement? Was the chivalric ideal of devotion to love and war so wholly mistaken that the life of a mill operative can be accepted as in all respects an advantageous substitute? Was the opinion of the ancient philosophers that virtue and industrial occupation were incompatible so far astray that we can accept industrial occupation of the narrower sort as morally sufficient in itself?

Specialization is a great industrial principle and a chief means of modern civilization. And specialization may be also a means of spiritual success where it enables a man to carry some one art to the point of mastery, so concentrating his power that he may break through at some one point into a higher circle of expression and of life. But even in such a case, where specialization is in some art capable of being the vehicle of the human spirit, there is need of supplementary activity. No man is quite all singer, sculptor, scientist. Even in the case of these, some overflow, some supplementary activity, is necessary. There is some observance still due to that part of the bounteous human nature in them that even their art could not convey.

But specialization as we see it in our modern industry is not specialization upon an art nor according to the laws of art. It is not even specialization upon a service, upon a whole achievement of any sort. It is specialization *within* the task, carried often to so extreme a point, leaving to each worker so minute a contribution to the result, that nothing of significance is left. It is like the division of a fabric into pieces so small that neither form nor color is any longer visible. There is nothing either in the sort of activity or in the relation to results produced that can become to any important degree a channel for the human soul.

A man, it is true, can so add up his column of figures that they shall become columns of strength and beauty in his life. He can so devote himself to any task as to make it an expression of moral worth. But he cannot through every task liberate the creative



principle, utter the word that nature has intrusted to him. A man, if he has a hero's soul, can die heroically under any circumstances. But social conditions under which death and renunciation are the best opportunity offered cannot be considered a success. It is the business of society to offer to its members a way of life, not merely the liberty to die. As industrial civilization advances, and with it specialization becomes more extreme, the need of some other outlet, of some overflow for the part of human nature that industry leaves unexpressed, and becomes intensified.

The truth behind the ancient feeling that menial labor is degrading, behind our instinct that the life of the factory drudge is not a life, is that man power is not like steam power a mere matter of foot tons. Man's strength does not consist of simple undifferentiated capacity for muscular contraction or nervous effort. It is, on the contrary, a power in great part prescribed, committed, billeted to certain ends. It exists only toward its predestined tasks and withers or ceases altogether except as it finds a way to them.

Man is the creature of certain kinds of acts and exists only as he embodies them—a fact that can be verified by anyone who will watch a growing child. There the process of his construction is laid before the eyes of anyone who will take the trouble to observe. From the time when the baby finds his hands, wields his rattle or his spoon, you can trace the growth through achievement of the achieving animal, the self-creation of this creature who becomes himself through the doing of things that are to him significant. Through action are then visibly wound the main fibres of his being. You can see man the creator fashioning himself through the making of block houses and mud pies; man the nurturer, growing through the care of dolls and pets and plants; man the poet evolved in the rhythmic plays; man the scientist in plays of imitation, of collecting, dissecting, classifying; man the fighter, wrought in the hundred games of contest; man the hunter in the chasing games; and man the citizen through team play.

There in children's play you can see going on before your eyes, in a series of acts clear and unmistakable, the process that makes man what he is. And the essential point to observe is that, through all his life, it is by obedience to these constituting activities that first created him that he keeps himself alive.



Man is the incarnation of his leading instincts—not primarily of the mere appetites or hungers, which control the subordinate, physiological manifestations of his being, but more wholly and pervasively by the great forthputting instincts, the creative, the assertive, the instincts of achievement. In the deepest sense he is these instincts. They are the ultimate fact about him, giving his true form and law, constituting the final and irreducible substance of which he is composed. His body is their tool. His mind and heart are emanations of them. Man is a process. His law is a law of action. Matter passes through him as through a wave in a rapid, and takes the shape which the law of his action gives it, as it obeys the laws of gravitation and momentum in the wave. He is not the material but the law, or rather the fulfillment of it, and exists as he embodies it.

In proportion as he is a maker, a fighter, a hunter, a nurturer, an investigator, a citizen, an artist—achievement set to rhythm—the man is really there. Uninformed by these constituent purposes he is a scarecrow, a derelict, the left-off clothes of a soul that has abdicated. These purposes create the man in the play and apprenticeship of his long infancy. In maturity their fulfillment still constitutes his life. When they cease to operate, the flame goes out.

That life is in these master instincts is a fact not opposed to or inconsistent with morality. Whatever the governing or selecting principle may be—an instinct of instincts, pure reason, conscience, over-soul, however it may be named, the bearer of ultimate authority enforced by the power of life and death—the master instincts constitute the substance with which this selecting principle has to deal. They form the realm of which volition is the king.

Moreover, it is important to note that obedience to the achieving instincts is never self-indulgence but always self-surrender. Their prescription states itself ever in the form of an extra-personal ideal, inexorable, independent of the subject's will. The true fighter, artist, nurturer, citizen, is such through subordination to the impersonal end, often to the sacrifice of life itself.

Man as his active nature has thus created him finds himself to a great extent a stranger in the modern world. It is no longer the world for which nature designed him, to which his great constituent instincts accurately relate. It is no longer a world of war



and hunting, and it is for many of its people becoming a world in which even the building creating instinct finds but a meagre satisfaction. Man the hunter, the nurturer, the creator, finds himself set down for the best hours of his day, during all the working years of life, to tasks so dessicated of all meaning, so barren of power to convey the expression of a human soul, that the soul is well-nigh starved out of him. That store of vital energy which should have gone to fighting him out a way of utterance has run to spiritual waste and left him dumb, imprisoned. This is the tragedy of civilization—that the end of all our labor and our sacrifice has been, for so many men and women, the defeat of that inner life which it was our whole object to preserve.

Mr. Roosevelt's insistence on the moral value of war or of the warlike virtues indicates a sound instinct for spiritual values. William James, in his search for peaceful substitutes for war, is a pioneer in a program of conservation of spiritual values in our industrial society that will before long constitute an essential feature of the policy of all progressive communities. But fighting is only one of the vital instincts left unfulfilled in modern industry. The cause of civilization is the substitution of processes that effectively secure a living for more ancient ones which, though less efficient to that end, had the inestimable virtue that they also expressed a life. The cure is, in part, to re-charge these processes with the power of expression.

The deepest industrial problem of our time is not the problem of wages or even that of proper hygienic conditions, important as these are, but of so preparing the man for his employment, and modifying the employment to fit the man, that the process of gaining a livelihood shall no longer be, in so large a proportion of instances, a denial of the possibility of life itself.

Such is our weekday problem—as Ruskin so well saw and said—to find the artist in the artisan, to restore man the creator in the present slave to the making of useful things. Our Sunday problem is supplementary—to find room for that part of each man's life which his daily industry has shown itself unable to contain.

And this problem is not a hopeless one. If civilization has for a great proportion of mankind sterilized the working day, it has provided compensation in its enhancement of the possibilities



of leisure. What it has taken from industry it has more than given back in art. Music, poetry and literature are more satisfying embodiments of life than nature ever gave. But for those who are denied participation in its leisure, whose loss in industry is not returned in art, civilization has been a loss almost unrelieved. It is to the opportunities of leisure as provided by a shorter working day, and above all to those afforded by Sunday, in which there is not merely leisure but strength and daylight and the morning hours, that civilized man must look for compensation. Sunday is the people's university, the day of liberal education, devoted to universal interests. It is the day for cultivating those things that belong to us not as industrial implements but as men.

I will return to the hills whence is my strength. Sunday is renewal, a rejoining of the primal sources of our life. In the island of Capri they have a pretty custom, a survival such as one finds in all South Italy of the Greek processional religion, in accordance with which the Madonna goes every spring for a week to revisit her former home down by the seashore where the church used to stand. There is an important symbolism in this old ceremony, and one in harmony with our present theme. Sunday is the day for revisiting the ancient shrines, for going back to the fountains of our strength, back in our racial past, for excursions to our ancient abode by stream and wood and seashore, for the revival of the joy of war, of the chase, and of intense membership as found in the great team games.

The true Sunday will be partly different for different men. Each to his natural habitat as Mother Nature calls. The artist condemned to office work will turn to his carving, the musician to his violin. The born teacher will spend his Sunday with the children—and all of us, I hope, are teachers to some extent. The Nimrod will to the woods, the poet to the hills, the soldier to some athletic contest. That which he should have been, and is not in his daily work, each man will diligently seek on the day given him for this very purpose, that he should keep his soul alive.

The forbidding of such pious pilgrimage on that one day of the week consecrated by nature, and by the wiser portions of our law, to the end that such pilgrimage may be made, is not truly a Sunday law, but a law to the effect that Sunday shall not exist.



Even those whose good fortune has placed them among the expressive trades, the lawyer, the doctor, the business man, require some avocation to keep them fully human and alive. To the clerk, the factory hand, whose weekday life is within the covers of a ledger or in the making of a simple muscular contraction—to these Sunday is their one chance of life, their day of standing erect, of resuming the form and stature of a man.

Sunday is the day of the lost talents, of unfulfilled possibilities, the day for keeping alive some little fragment of the original gift that nature made. And this one day our Sunday laws take from us, or at least greatly impair.

For the young the need of Sunday is especially vital, the loss of it especially severe. The master instincts of our lives are not all equally present at all periods. Youth is the reign of some of those whose fulfillment cannot be packed into the narrow confines of a sedentary or meaningless occupation. Our industrial world differs most markedly from that of which nature is still dreaming in every growing boy and girl. The young man is still in his heart a viking, a soldier, a mighty hunter before the Lord. His soul is not fulfilled by adding figures or watching a machine.

And to the young especially the matter is one of life and death. Obedience to the great expressive instincts is during infancy, even up to the full age of twenty-one, a matter not merely of preserving life but of attaining it. With young people the question is not of survival merely but of whether they shall ever live at all. To our boys and girls from fourteen to twenty-one years old, of whom a large and increasing proportion of our factory population now consists, our Sunday laws are the denial of life, the permanent dwarfing, through starvation, of the growing soul.

The whole purpose of Sunday is a chance to grow and live. It is the one day consecrated and set aside, by nature and by man, to such fulfillment of our humanity as the necessities of our weekday labor cannot afford. When, on the top of long hours of sterilizing work, we impose this Sunday law to rob the mature worker and the growing youth of this one day in which nature might have had her part in them, to make them strong and beautiful and happy, we have sinned against nature and the spirit of Sunday, the brightest and happiest of our institutions.



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